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Zen koan

Clap with one hand

The abbot of Kennin Monastery was Mokurai - Silent Thunder. He had a pet named Toyo, who was only twelve years old. Toyo saw other students coming to the teacher every morning and evening for instructions on sanzen—one-on-one instruction in which a student is given a koan, an exercise to stop the mind from wandering. Toyo also wanted sanzen for himself.

“Wait a little,” said Mokurai, “you are still too young.”

But the child insisted so much that the teacher finally agreed.

In the evening at the appointed hour, little Toyo came to Mokurai for sanzen. He announced his arrival by hitting the gong, without crossing the threshold, bowed respectfully three times and sat down in front of the teacher, maintaining polite silence.

“You can hear the sound of two clapping hands,” Mokurai said. - Show me what one sounds like.

Toyo bowed and went to his room to think about the problem. Geisha music was heard from the window.
- Yeah, I found it! - he exclaimed.

The next evening, when the teacher asked him to demonstrate the clap of one hand, Toyo began to play geisha music.

“No, no,” said Mokurai, “that won’t do.” This is not the clap of one hand at all. You did not understand anything.

Deciding that the music might disturb him, Toyo moved to live in a quiet place. He meditated again. What could be the clap of one hand? So he accidentally noticed the sound of dripping water. “Yes,” Toyo guessed. Coming again to the teacher, he imitated this sound.

- What? - asked Mokurai. “It’s the sound of dripping water, but not the clap of one hand.” Try again.

In vain Toyo meditated again, trying to hear the sound of one palm. He heard the sound of the wind, but this sound was also rejected. He heard the cry of an owl, but that didn't fit either. And the rustling of the locusts was also not the sound of one palm.

Toyo came to Mokurai more than ten times with different sounds. All of them were no good. For almost a whole year he thought about what the sound of one palm could be. Finally, Toyo entered into real meditation and found himself beyond all sounds.

“I could no longer collect sounds,” he later explained, “and therefore I achieved a silent sound.”

Toyo understood the sound of one palm.

I guess, I found solution

Clap with two hands

Clap with one hand